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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BUNDY

July 14, 1961

SUBJECT: Negotiations

1. One of the basic postulates of the Acheson memorandum -- repeated yesterday by Secretary Rusk -- is the notion that negotiations should not take place until the Berlin crisis becomes much more acute. In his present frame of mind, it is said, Mr. Khrushchev will not accept "reasonable" proposals. British readiness to negotiate is often contrasted with our firmness.
2. I am somewhat uneasy to have refusal to negotiate become a test of firmness. I do not like adjectives like "hard", "soft" or "firm" as applied to policy in the first place. But in any event, firmness should be related to the substance of our negotiation position. It should not, it seems to me, be proved by seeming to shy away from a diplomatic confrontation.
3. Though I agree that Khrushchev is unlikely to accept any "reasonable" proposal, this might be an argument for rather than against our taking the diplomatic initiative. A conference, after all, serves two purposes: (a) to achieve a settlement and (b) to define the issues for which to contend. If we are clear about what we consider a reasonable settlement, we should state our program. If Khrushchev rejects it, we are tactically in a much stronger position. Everybody knows what Khrushchev wants. Should we not develop a "Kennedy plan" for Central Europe? Any other course will see us jockeyed into a position of refusing diplomatic solutions. It will force us to rebut Soviet overtures and thus enable the Soviets gradually to determine the framework of the debate. In these conditions, the mere fact of a diplomatic confrontation, which I consider inevitable, will seem like a U.S. retreat.
4. I am not suggesting that diplomacy is an alternative to an improvement in our readiness. I think it is a necessary corollary to the build-up I favor. I would therefore urge that in announcing his plans for a build-up the President also indicate the range of diplomatic options he envisages. Preferably, these should

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relate to a general European settlement and not simply the Berlin issue.

5. To be sure, conferences can become a bromide. They do involve the danger of complacency. But whether this happens depends on our leadership. Indeed, if we ascribe excessive importance to the fact of a conference, the dangers which opponents of negotiation fear may be magnified. Then the mere fact that diplomats meet will be construed as a sign of relaxing tension. This is what happened under Eisenhower.

6. We confront two contradictory dangers in our diplomacy: (a) We must not give the impression that only lack of ingenuity in devising negotiating formulae stands in the way of a settlement, (b) But equally, we must not permit the Communists to monopolize the diplomatic forums. We can escape these dangers only by shifting the debate from the desirability of a conference to the substance of our program.

7. If the decision is against negotiating in the immediate future, a plan should be developed to deal with the inevitable Communist initiatives. What if in response to our build-up Khrushchev asks for a conference?

8. Finally, I would urge an immediate study about the role of the United Nations in the Berlin crisis. I do not expect it to be too helpful, but it will be involved and we must have our position worked out.

Henry A. Kissinger

cc -- Mr. Rostow

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